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# Paradoxes of (Il)liberal democracy: the role of Christian Democracy

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## Abstract

Studies on the democratic backsliding in Central Eastern Europe (CEE) often focus on local dysfunctions and idiosyncrasies, and they tend to overlook how those authoritarian tendencies are deeply influenced by European integration. I argue that the wave of authoritarianism in CEE is exacerbated by a shared political culture based on Christian Democracy (CD), and instead of divergence between Western and CEE, a form of convergence is happening. I point to CD's role in responding to the 'polanyian' tensions between democracy and liberalism. CD played an important role in shaping the present constitutional and ideational order of the European Union. The 'illiberal' policies enacted by several member countries-especially in the domains of Christian identity politics, traditional gender roles, and Bismarckian welfare-come out of the Christian-Democratic political toolbox and exemplify a paradoxical regime of authoritarian liberalism (or politics without policies) that does not threaten the (neo)liberal foundations of the EU.

**Keywords:** European Union, European integration, authoritarian liberalism, Christian Democracy, populism, illiberal democracy

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